

Council plans to apply to be new pilot community with Google

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Key Biscayne residents could be among the first to try out an ultra-high speed Internet connection that would allow users to download movies in mere minutes or stream three-dimensional images to recipients across the country.

At a Tuesday, February 23, Village Council meeting, local leaders said they're interested in applying to serve as a pilot community as Google experiments with developing a universal ultra-high speed broadband network.

Council member Michael Kelly brought up the idea last week after a resident emailed him and other Council members about Google's request for pilot communities. "I looked into it, and I found it very intriguing," Kelly said.

Kelly pointed out there are several factors that could give Key Biscayne a good chance of being picked as a test site: as an island, it offers a limited geographic area; its multicultural population would give Google an idea of how different demographic groups would respond to its services; and its affluence means a high percentage of residents are computer-savvy and likely to purchase Internet products.

Meanwhile, Village Manager Chip Iglesias noted the Village can also reach out to nearby entities to improve its chances even more.

He noted Google is specifically looking for test communities that feature universities and hospitals, so by partnering with entities on Virginia Key such as the University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine and Atmospheric Science, MAST Academy and National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, Key Biscayne might have an even better shot.

"We may be an attractive community for Google," Iglesias said, adding he is working on getting more details about what type of

construction work the project would involve.

After watching a video from Google about the initiative – and getting assurances that the project would not cost the Village a cent, as Google would install the infrastructure and individual residents could pay to subscribe – Council members were enthused.

"Go for it," Mayor Robert Vernon said; while Vice Mayor Enrique Garcia added, "It's a great idea."

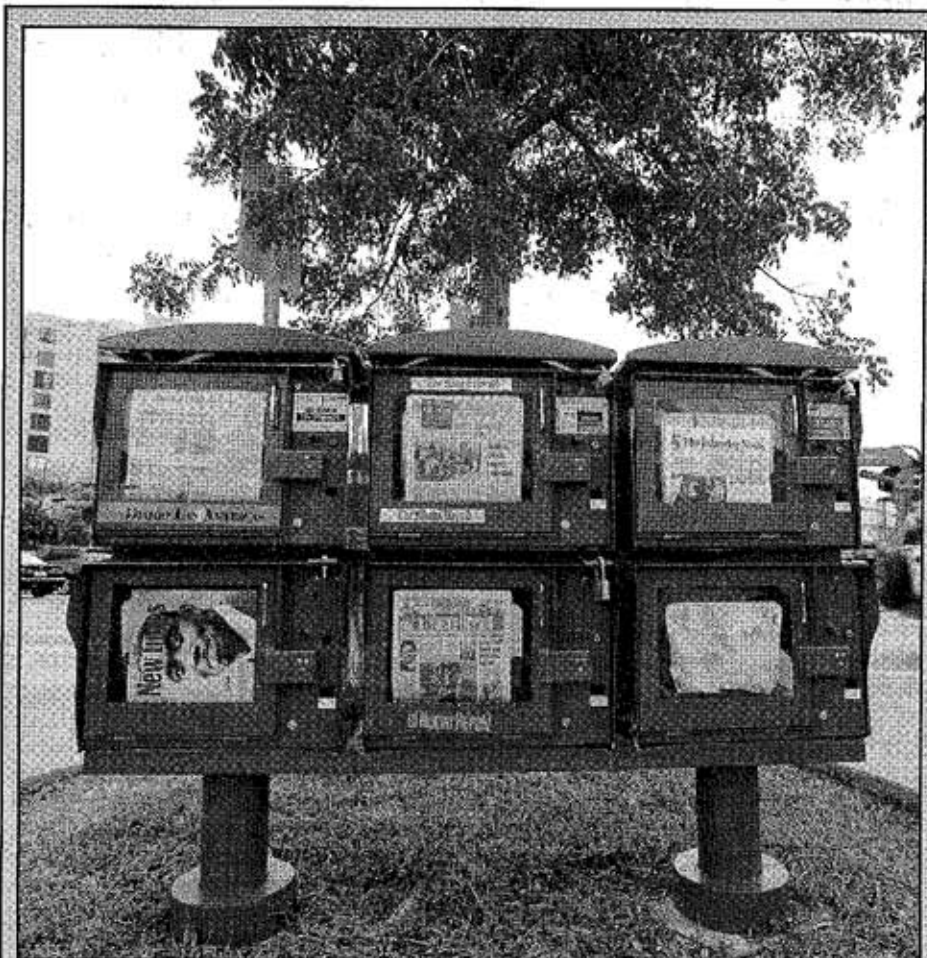
Google officials are equally enthused about the project – information in the video shown to the Council last week and on the company's official blog states the project is geared toward providing better, faster service to customers everywhere.

Connection speeds of one gigabyte per second – about 100 times faster than what the public has access to now – could be made available.

As Google reps state on their blog, "Imagine sitting in a rural health clinic, streaming three-dimensional medical imaging over the web and discussing a unique condition with a specialist in New York. Or downloading a high-definition, full-length feature film in less than five minutes. Or collaborating with classmates around the world while watching live 3-D video of a university lecture. Our goal is to experiment with new ways to help make Internet access better and faster for everyone."

Google officials add they plan to create an "open-access network," which means they will share the infrastructure with other service providers to give users more choices: "Through our trial, we hope to make a meaningful contribution to the shared goal of delivering faster and better Internet for everyone."

The Request for Information (RFI) the Council discussed last week is Google's first step in the process. Proposals are due March 26, and selected communities will be announced later this year. Not only local governments, but members of the public, can submit their community for consideration.



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